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IGNATIAN CONTEMPLATION IN THE CLASSROOM

Fostering Imagination in Graduate Scripture Study

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I still remember my first graduate course in Scripture. It was on the synoptic Gospels, and after an introductory session, we dove right in and discussed discipleship in Mark. We began by asking, "How does Mark present the disciples?" Our inquiry soon led us to wonder, "What does Jesus envision for his disciples—for us, today?" This question opened up Scripture for me. It was as if something like scales fell from my eyes; I felt I was reading Scripture for the very first time. Since then, I have taken many more Scripture courses. But as my knowledge about Scripture increased, my enthusiasm gradually decreased. I have read answers upon answers from commentaries and Bible dictionaries—pressed down, shaken together, and still overflowing—but my own questions have slowed down to a trickle. Like the members of the church in Ephesus addressed in the Book of Revelation, I had lost my former love. I felt what those belonging to the church in Laodicea were accused of: being lukewarm, neither hot nor cold.

It is a strange consolation—if it can be called that—to know that I am not alone in this predicament. In his many years of teaching in Christian seminaries, D. A. Carson, a Reformed Evangelical pastor and professor of the New Testament, has observed a common phenomenon among his students and paints this as a portrait of a young man he

names Ernest Christian: convinced by his prayer experiences and confirmed in his dream to pursue full-time Christian ministry by his congregation, Ernest heads off to study the Bible. He starts working towards a master's degree, eager to prepare to be a minister of the Word. But, after six months in the seminary memorizing Greek morphology and sifting through details like the itinerary of Paul's second missionary journey, Ernest is not that earnest anymore in his desire to learn about Scripture. He now knows how to write exegetical papers, but somehow, after doing his lexical study, his syntactical diagram, his survey of critical opinions, and his evaluation of conflicting evidence, the Bible does not feel as alive to him as it once did. The fault, he knows, is not in his professors who are all knowledgeable and godly believers. So what has parched what once was a wellspring for his faith?[1]

How do we recover passion in graduate Scripture study? When the Bible as taught in the classroom becomes nothing more than a valley of dry bones, what can breathe life into it again? The key I present in this article is imagination.

Paul Ricoeur, writing on the Bible and imagination, asks:

> Is not the imagination, by common consent, a faculty of free invention, therefore something not governed by rules, something wild and untamed? What is more, is it not condemned to wandering about the internal spaces of what we conventionally call the mental kingdom, and does it not therefore lack any referential import, being entirely disconnected from what is really real? As for the Bible, is it not a closed book, one whose meaning is fixed forever and therefore the enemy of any radically original creation of meaning? Does it not claim to give rise to an existential and ontological commitment, one hostile to any imaginative drifting from here to there?[2]

In answer to these questions, Ricoeur defines imagination first "as a rule-governed form of invention or, in other terms, as a norm-governed

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[1]Donald Arthur Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 23.

[2]Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, ed. Mark I. Wallace (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 144.

productivity" and secondly "as the power of redescribing reality."[3] As for the Bible, Ricoeur asserts that reading is "a dynamic activity that is not confined to repeating significations fixed forever," and that reading a text such as Scripture involves "a creative operation unceasingly employed in decontextualizing its meaning and recontextualizing it in today's *Sitz-im-Leben*."[4]

In the next pages, I present Ignatian contemplation as a way of praying with our imagination that, far from just fantasizing, is a norm-governed productivity, an engagement with Scripture that redescribes reality, and a dynamic activity that enables the Bible to speak to us today. After a brief introduction to St. Ignatius and his *Spiritual Exercises*, I describe how Jesuit novices are prepared for and then guided through the experience of contemplation during the thirty-day retreat structured by Ignatius. I then propose a way to incorporate elements of this process into classroom teaching and conclude with some reflections on imagination based on insights from Ignatian contemplation.

This article is written for Scripture professors in Christian graduate institutions that are strongly rooted in their confessional character. In these schools, majority of the students are often being prepared for ministry. The focus, therefore, is not in forming exegetes but pastors who can help others read the Bible.

St. Ignatius, the *Spiritual Exercises*, and Contemplation

Ignatius (1491–1556) was a Basque noble from Loyola in Spain. His military and courtly career was cut short when, in 1521, his right leg was shattered by a cannonball during the battle of Pamplona. While recuperating in the family castle, Ignatius underwent a religious conversion. After his leg healed, he lived as a hermit in a cave in

[3]Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 144.

[4]Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 145.

Manresa for several months. During this time, he experienced mystical insights and felt that God was teaching him "just as a schoolmaster treats a child."[5] Ignatius thought of himself as a *peregrino*, a pilgrim, and what he learned in Manresa he used to journey with others through exercises meant to prepare people to rid themselves of their disordered attachments and devote themselves to God. This process was later published as a series of practical notes for other retreat-guides and was called the *Spiritual Exercises* (SpEx).

Ignatius is best known as the founder of the Society of Jesus or the Jesuits. Central to the formation of all Jesuits is the full experience of the *Spiritual Exercises* over thirty days. In the beginning, however, the *Exercises* were meant for a broader spectrum of Christians—lay, religious, and priests. Thus, while the ideal form of the *Exercises* is a month-long retreat, there are modifications to give them in a shortened version or in the midst of daily life.

One way of praying that is utilized in the *Exercises* is contemplation. Contrasted with more discursive styles of reflection that mainly involve thinking through things, contemplation is more imaginative and leads the pray-er to immerse himself or herself in a scene from the Bible. As a method, contemplation consists of entering faith memories recorded in Scripture in such a way as to experience oneself as present in Biblical episodes. God, Jesus, and other characters are met as real persons "face to face."

How can using the imagination in this way already be considered prayer and not just an exercise of fantasy? Essential to an imaginative contemplation of Scripture is the belief that the Bible is the Word of God. The events contemplated belong not only to the past but to the present of every believer. In contemplating Scripture, a believer in honest search of the Divine encounters God who continues to reach out to us, drawing us into union with God's self and sharing God's

[5]Ignatius of Loyola, *The Autobiography of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, trans. Joseph O'Callaghan (New York: Fordham University Press, 1992), 37.

vision and desires for the world with us.[6] This will be made clearer when examples of contemplations are presented below.

How are Jesuit novices prepared for and guided through the *Spiritual Exercises*?

Remote Preparation

It should be expected that preparation for a thirty-day retreat would include workshops on the what, the why, and the how of prayer. But aside from these, there are also modules on the historical-critical aspects of the Bible and primers on revelation and Christology. While some might think that these can possibly be a distraction in prayer, Jerome Nadal, Ignatius's closest collaborator in the early days of the Society of Jesus, described Ignatius as making use of "books and the whole of theological reasoning, at least when he decided to put together those *Exercises*, so that all the books, theologians, all the sacred writings, could confirm what he had taken more from divine inspiration than from books."[7]

During Ignatius's time, there were two currents of thought, each with its own tendency to become one-sided: evangelical humanism (or what Ignatius called positive theology) and scholastic theology. With which movement did Ignatius side? He wrote,

> We should praise both positive theology and scholastic theology. For as it is more characteristic of the positive doctors, such as St. Jerome, St. Augustine, and St. Gregory, to move the heart to love and serve God in all things, so it is more characteristic of the scholastics like St. Thomas, St. Bonaventure, the Master of the Sentences, etc., to define

[6]Michael Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises: Text and Commentary: A Handbook for Retreat Directors*, Iñigo Texts Series Vol. 4 (Leominster: Gracewing, 1998), 90.

[7]Jerome Nadal, as quoted by Helmut Gabel, "Ignatian Contemplation and Modern Biblical Studies," *The Way* 44:2 (April 2005): 45.

> or explain for our times what is necessary for salvation, and for the more effective refutation and exposure of every error and fallacy. (SpEx 363)

This is an excellent example of the *Tantum-Quantum* principle in the *Exercises:* to use all things in so far as they help us towards our end.

For Ignatius, intellectual reflection and rational thinking are not foreign to spiritual experience. In fact, official Catholic teaching also promotes the use of historical-critical methods in reading and praying with Scripture. *Dei Verbum* (DV), drawing a parallelism with the mystery of the Incarnation, provides the theological rationale for giving importance to the fruits of Biblical scholarship: "For the words of God, expressed in human language, have been made like human discourse, just as the Word of the eternal Father, when he took on himself the flesh of human weakness, became like human beings" (DV 13). Scripture is God's words through human words, and so we must study these human words with all our human faculties. Historical-critical methods[8] are indispensable tools in reading Scripture.

Filipino Biblical scholar and bishop Pablo David, in a course on the role of imagination in Biblical interpretation, couches imaginative reading in terms of interpolative reading: interpolation is "connecting the dots" and finding upward, downward, or sideward trends. But before you can connect the dots, the dots must first be found and

[8]Included under the umbrella of historical-critical methods are: textual criticism (gathering ancient witnesses in Hebrew, Greek, and other Near Eastern languages, comparing these manuscripts, and discerning the earliest form we can reconstruct); historical philology (establishing the meaning and use of a word in particular contexts); form criticism (attending to the distinctive literary form or genre of the text); source criticism (seeking what the Biblical author may have integrated into his composition); redaction criticism (finding out how and why a Biblical editor arranged his sources the way he did and the point he was making in doing so); rhetorical criticism (focusing on the use of language and structure to get the readers' attention or persuade them to do something); literary criticism (studying the characters, plots, narrative points of view, and other elements of the story); and all other methods which seek to determine the contexts and most probable original meaning of texts. While not all of these are tackled in the preparation for the *Spiritual Exercises*, Jesuit novices are at least made aware of the varied ways of dealing with Scripture.

taken seriously.[9] These "dots," in Ricoeur's terms, are the norms or rules that govern the imagination.

Historical-critical methods help us see more clearly some of the dots in the text, which can also serve to make our imagination more vivid. For example, archaeological studies of the Jerusalem temple can give us a better picture of Jesus turning over the tables of the money changers and driving out those selling animals for sacrifice. But historical-critical dots are not the only dots we need to connect—as Scripture scholar Luke Timothy Johnson urges, we cannot just be preoccupied with the world that produced the Bible. We must enter the world that the Bible produces.[10] And this world that Scripture invites us to enter includes ourselves.

Part of the remote preparation for the *Exercises* is devoted to psycho-spiritual sessions to help the novices process possible issues involving family and relationships, sexuality, and personal vocation. No one today can deny that a reader's context and preconceptions affect his or her interpretation. We cannot completely take away the subjective element in reading anything—nor should we try to, especially in reading Scripture. But we must always seek to be more humbly aware of where we are coming from and what our assumptions may be. Many times, too, it is precisely in the act of wrestling with a text that these assumptions come to light. A novice may ask, "If I have difficulty imagining God as a father, is it because of something in my family history? If so, what can I do then to retrieve or re-conceive this central image of God?" These psycho-spiritual realities are part of the dots which govern our imagination, dots which we need to connect.

Shortly before the thirty-day retreat begins for the Jesuit novices, films on the stories of the Bible are made available for their viewing.

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[9]Minerva Generalao, "Viewing Last Supper through Imagination," *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (April 2, 2015), http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/682948/viewing-last-supper-through-imagination (accessed April 20, 2015).

[10]Luke Timothy Johnson, "Imagining the World Scripture Imagines," *Modern Theology* 14:2 (April 1, 1998): 165.

These movies and their portrayals of well-known narratives play their part in triggering the imagination. Whether we agree with their depictions or not, they make us more aware of how Scripture invites imagination and needs the reader to flesh out its narratives. As the last verse of the fourth Gospel states, "There are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" (John 21:25). We know that Jesus taught, healed, and prayed. But what did he do in between? We are familiar with his parables, but *how* did he tell them? With a glint of humor in his eye? With sarcasm dripping heavily in his tone? What if the seven woes attributed to Jesus in Matthew 23 were not said with anger but with genuine sadness?

Immediate Preparation

During the thirty-day retreat, each Jesuit novice is assigned a spiritual director who, like Ignatius the pilgrim, journeys with him, lays out the prayer points and Scriptural texts he should consider, and helps him discern whether or not it is time to move on to the next set of points and texts or to stay longer with the present ones. Once the Bible texts are given, the novice is expected to familiarize himself with the passage. The texts themselves and their actual contents should be the first "dots" or "rules" that must be considered by the imagination.

The night before or even shortly before praying, the novice should have already read the passage more than once and allowed it "to sink in." More theoretical questions (e.g., "What is the point of this pericope in the broader setting of the chapter and the book?") are better addressed during this stage to avoid their possibly sidetracking or intruding during prayer time. Jesuit religious historian and spiritual director Philip Sheldrake, from his many years of directing retreats, advises that during the actual prayer period, the texts should only be on the side.[11] Scripture is not the focus of Ignatian contemplation; the Bible is only a door that will hopefully open to an encounter.

[11]Philip Sheldrake, "Imagination and Prayer," *The Way* 24:2 (April 1984), 96.

Ignatius suggests that retreatants, immediately before prayer, mark the beginning of the session with a mental act and bodily ritual: "A step or two before the place where I have to contemplate or meditate, I will stand for the space of an *Our Father* and, with my mind raised up, consider how God our Lord is looking at me … I will then make a genuflection or some other act of humility" (SpEx 75).

The Experience of Contemplation

All Ignatian contemplations begin with a preparatory prayer "to ask God our Lord for grace that all [one's] intentions, actions, and operations may be directed purely to the service and praise of his Divine Majesty" (SpEx 46).

Part of the preparation is a "composition of place." An example from the contemplation of the Nativity of Christ tells us what Ignatius would want the exercitant to do:

> Here this will be to see with the eyes of the imagination the road from Nazareth to Bethlehem, considering the length and the breadth of it, whether it is a flat road or goes through valleys or over hills; and similarly to observe the place or grotto of the nativity, to see how big or small it is, how high, and what is in it. (SpEx 112)

In other contemplations, aside from seeing the persons (SpEx 106), Ignatius encourages the retreatant to listen to what the characters in the episode are saying and how they talk (SpEx 107), and to be immersed in the scene by imagining the smells and tastes (SpEx 124) and what sensations may be brought to touch (SpEx 125). The purpose of imagining what the body may sense is to stir up the emotions. In Ignatian contemplation, the pray-er must use not only his or her understanding but must also wrestle with emotions, "inner feeling," and "affections" (SpEx 2–3). For example, in contemplating Jesus's prayer and agony after the Last Supper, after composing the place and seeing with the eyes of the imagination Jesus sweating blood (Luke 22:39–44), the exercitant is directed to ask for the grace of "grief with Christ in grief, to be broken with Christ broken, for tears and interior suffering on account of the great suffering that Christ endured for me" (SpEx 203).

Neuroscience has shown that by imagining bodily expressions of emotions (e.g., facial expressions, posture, and vocal intonations—and even sweating blood), we are able to comprehend the emotions of others. These emotions do not remain in the abstract but are also embodied or felt in the body of the one imagining. These embodied emotions then produce emotional states. In other words, by imagining the physical signs of the emotions of others, our bodies are able to feel what they are feeling, and we come closer to empathizing with others. Moreover, these emotions mediate cognitive responses involved in recognition or identification, evaluation, and memory.[12] The body has a way of "knowing," and emotions, too, are a way of "knowing" which affects what the mind comes to know.

Physical senses and feelings are effective ways to trigger the imaginative process, but they also serve a greater purpose. Knowing through our bodies and knowing through our emotions (two ways of knowing which cannot easily or clearly be separated and even distinguished) are not supposed to end only in sentimentalism or the acquisition of new thoughts and ideas. The point of these bodily and emotional preludes—and the point of Ignatian contemplation, as mentioned before—is to facilitate an encounter with the God we desire to know.

Sheldrake shares the contemplation experience of one retreatant (not a Jesuit novice):[13]

> She was contemplating the incident of Peter walking on the water (Matthew 14:22–33). At the start, she had no difficulty in imagining herself in a boat, as she had sailed when she was younger. She was familiar with the frustration and fear of fighting against a strong wind and current. This helped her to "get inside" the scene. (Here we see how bodily memories can help the imagination.) Jesus was there, and she,

[12]See Paula M. Niedenthal, Lawrence W. Barsalou, François Ric, & Silvia Krauth-Gruber, "Embodiment in the Acquisition and Use of Emotion Knowledge," in Lisa Feldman Barrett, Paula M. Niedenthal, & Piotr Winkielman, eds., *Emotion and Consciousness* (New York: Guilford Press, 2005), 21–44.

[13]Sheldrake, "Imagination and Prayer," 92.

> like Peter, had a strong desire to join him on the water. However, she also felt unable to get out of the boat. Though she tried, she could not imagine herself stepping out of the boat and so the prayer, according to her, "went wrong at that point." Why did she feel that the contemplation had broken down? Up until then, she could identify with the actual events in the Gospel, but when she could not get out of the boat, the story took an unexpected turn. She said to Jesus, "I cannot get out of this boat." She felt Jesus asking her why, and she had to admit that [she] was scared[:] "I can sail, but I can't swim very well." She then felt that Jesus was asking her whether she thought that he would make her do something beyond her capacity. Her answer: "Yes, you would … you often have." This experience led the person to spend the remainder of the prayer sitting and talking to Christ about the fact that she did not really trust him because she did not know him well enough.

It would help us to understand contemplation better by noting a few observations. First, the retreatant was not just a spectator in the story; she was fully involved. Though she identified with Peter, the experience was not just a retelling of Peter's story but an unfolding of her own, which included her present context and all her concerns—conscious and unconscious. While bodily sensations were strong in the beginning, they gradually faded. These can help one enter into contemplation, but they are not the point of the prayer, and are only one aspect of the imagination. She did not hear Jesus speaking to her. She "felt" Jesus asking her things and conversing with her. This is the purpose of imaginative contemplation: an encounter with the Lord that engages our deepest realities. But did the prayer go wrong because it did not follow the text of the Gospel? The experience was still set in the general parameters of the passage, but from the "dots" and "rules" of the text, there was a shift to more relevant "dots" and "rules"—the retreatant's most pressing needs, which she may also not have been aware of or at least not been able to articulate until that time. As Sheldrake writes, "Imaginative contemplation, when it works, takes on a life of its own—and [this] life is that of the person praying."[14]

But what if something happens in contemplation that is, from the Christian point of view, obviously wrong? Sheldrake recounts the

[14]Sheldrake, "Imagination and Prayer," 93.

experience of another retreatant who, in prayer, "felt" Jesus tell him, "I am not going to start loving you, until you learn how to love me."[15] While what happens in contemplation always has validity and truth, this must still be evaluated and interpreted. This will be tackled below after we discuss the final step of every contemplation.

The end of the contemplation is not just an appendage to the prayer but its culmination.[16] Underlining the importance of encounter, Ignatius directs the exercitant to make a colloquy with God. "A colloquy, properly so called, means speaking as one friend speaks with another, or a servant with a master" (SpEx 54).

Processing the Experience

"After finishing the exercise, I will either sit down or walk around for a quarter of an hour while I see how things have gone for me during the contemplation …" (SpEx 77). This is when the exercitant can do some journaling about the contemplation experience and interpret it. This "review of prayer" is a transitional space of processing which would have been inappropriate during the prayer itself.[17] During prayer, the exercitant should try to lose herself or himself in the experience and not yet be concerned about its meaning or interpretation, which is essential to the experience but which must be dealt with only subsequently.

Post-prayer interpretation is also a work of the imagination. Interpretation is a way of seeing things that seeks to grasp them and make meaning out of them. And making meanings is one step towards what Ricoeur speaks of as redescribing reality. For example, a tragic accident involving the loss of limbs and mobility can be interpreted as the end of someone's life. Later on, however, that same person can interpret his or her loss as the impetus for discovering new things about

[15]Sheldrake, "Imagination and Prayer," 94.

[16]Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, 53.

[17]Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, 68.

himself or herself and the beginning of a new life. The undeniable fact of the accident is given new meaning, and with this new meaning, reality is redescribed.

"I am not going to start loving you, until you learn how to love me." Christian tradition does not support this image of God, and what Christian tradition says is included in the "dots" and "norms" imagination or interpretation must take into account. Perhaps what the retreatant felt Jesus was telling him was a reflection of a hurtful experience festering in the retreatant's memories. There is still something true in his contemplation; it is true because it is what the retreatant feels. But it is a truth that must undergo interpretation, and hopefully, reality will be redescribed in a way that is more life-giving.

There are good and there are better interpretations. For these latter, we must be open to interpretations and input coming from others. The retreat director, in this case, must clarify Christian tradition and help the retreatant discern the meaning of his prayer experience.

At the end of each day of contemplation, Ignatius suggests the prayer that has come to be called the application of the senses. The exercitant is supposed to go through the contemplations of that day and just remember and relish the bodily sensations he or she experienced. It is an exercise of relishing and intensifying what was experienced, feeling the emotions connected with these bodily senses again (as discussed above), and dwelling on them.

Part of the processing of the entire thirty-day retreat are multiple sessions at the end of the *Exercises* for the novices to share their most important contemplations or those that they still have to figure out. These become opportunities for the Jesuits to hear other interpretations of similar experiences and to challenge or further deepen their own.

How can we integrate Ignatian contemplation in classroom teaching?

What may have been unexpected in the preparation for the *Exercises*—the turn to historical-critical methods—is, of course, very

much expected in and should be the bulk of the classroom experience of graduate Scripture study. What I propose to include in classroom teaching is the element of prayer and encounter.

Before each class, students should be assigned a passage (the shorter the better) that will be discussed during that session. They should then be expected to familiarize themselves with it and its context and perhaps read one commentary about it. At the start of each meeting, the teacher can begin with a simple ritual similar to what Ignatius suggests above to briefly consider God looking at the class. It can be as simple as the teacher saying, "Let us open our Bibles and prepare to listen to God," and then pausing for a few moments with heads bowed. This ritual already begins and emphasizes the encounter.

A student can then be asked to read the passage slowly. If, for example, the class is on the passion of Jesus, the passage can be John 18:15–18, the first time Peter denies Jesus. After a few moments of silence, the teacher can ask the students to focus on one part of the passage that is open to bodily sensations (it would be good if this part of the passage can be connected to an important point in the discussion for that day). In our sample passage, this can be the charcoal fire that Peter stood close to in order to warm himself. Let this detail be the entry point to the contemplation. The students can then be asked to place and imagine themselves in the scene, and to engage their bodily senses as they do so. After a few minutes, the teacher can end the short contemplation by asking the students, "What feelings have been aroused in you during this short prayer experience?" along with an important follow-up question, "What do you think God is communicating to you through these feelings and through what you just imagined?"

"What do you feel?" is a question rarely asked in graduate Scripture study, and this may be a reason for dryness in reading the Bible. Adam Zeman, a cognitive neurologist from the University of Exeter Medical School, used state-of-the-art functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) technology to map the way the brain responds to poetry and prose. He scanned and compared the brains of volunteers

while they read two types of material: literal prose such as an extract from a heating installation manual, and more poetic writings such as evocative passages from novels and sonnets. He found that more emotionally charged texts aroused areas on the right side of the brain which had previously been shown to give rise to the sensation of having "shivers down the spine." This response was also seen in volunteers listening to and being emotionally moved by music.[18]

If poetry and music are processed in what is usually the non-dominant right side of the brain, while materials like heating installation manuals are processed by the dominant and analytical left side,[19] does this mean that dryness in reading Biblical texts comes from analyzing them too much and depending on just the left side of our brains? How can we go beyond treating Scripture like a heating installation manual? An attention to emotions may help us involve the right side of the brain. We must remind ourselves again, though, that the point here is not just to be moved to feel but to dispose ourselves more to an encounter.

Regarding the feelings and personal concerns which may be brought to light by Ignatian contemplation, we cannot expect the teacher to do any psycho-spiritual processing during class, but it is valid to ask: Should not a Christian graduate institution preparing future pastors ensure that there are venues and opportunities such as spiritual direction, counseling, or genogram or enneagram workshops for the students to know themselves more deeply?

About the retreat director, Ignatius writes:

> Someone who gives to another a way and a plan for meditating and contemplating must provide a faithful account of the history to be meditated or contemplated, but in such a way as to run over salient

[18]Rick Nauert, "Poetry: Music to the Mind," *PsychCentral* (October 10, 2013), http://psychcentral.com/news/2013/10/10/poetry-music-to-the-mind/60555.html (accessed March 15, 2015).

[19]See Solomon Snyder, "Seeking God in the Brain—Efforts to Localize Higher Brain Function," *New England Journal of Medicine* 358:1 (January 2008): 6–7.

> points with only brief or summary explanations. For if the other begins contemplating with a true historical foundation, and then goes over this history and reflects on it personally, he or she may by themselves come upon things which throw further light on it or which more fully bring home its meaning. Whether this arises out of the person's own reasoning or from the enlightenment of divine grace, more gratification and spiritual fruit is to be found than if the giver of the exercises had explained and developed the meaning of the history at length. (SpEx 2)

The graduate Scripture professor should, of course, say more than the retreat director especially in providing an account of the text from a historical-critical perspective, but the caution for both remain. Saying too much and leaving nothing for the exercitant to discover for himself or herself impedes not only the contemplative process but the whole process of learning as well. The director's job is to point out a vein which the exercitant can mine for himself or herself.[20] The teacher's task is similar. More than just about student-centered learning and the teacher being a guide-on-the-side rather than a sage-on-a-stage, what should also be stressed here is the fact that even with volumes and volumes of scholarly research published, there is still much to be said about Scripture. There are good and not-so-good commentaries, but there has been no final word yet about the Bible. Nor will there ever be in this world. The teacher must not give the impression that in saying much, everything can be said. Open-endedness is an invitation to mystery and can be an incentive for the imagination.

Another reason for the open-ended quality of Scripture is because it continues to speak to our circumstances today. The teacher must always endeavor to show students how the Bible, though ancient in its history, still addresses the present world. Here we have a reminder that will also serve those giving and those undergoing the *Exercises*. There is a danger that Ignatian contemplation can end up only being about *my* feelings, *my* desires, and *my* relationship with God. These are actually part of the disordered attachments the *Exercises* seek to free us from. Ignatian spirituality is always looking outside of oneself to

[20]Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, 4.

the world where God continues to labor. The needs of the world are also part of the "dots" and "norms" the imagination must consider.

During the class discussion, the teacher can show video clips from different films portraying the scene just contemplated. Philip Yancey has discovered this to be an effective way for students to be exposed to different depictions and to compare a director's vision with their own. Discerning a filmmaker's preconceptions about a certain scene can also help students be more aware of their own silent assumptions.[21] Sharing in small groups after viewing these clips or after strategic points in the discussion can open students to even more possible interpretations as well as reveal their own "prejudices" (in the Gadamerian understanding of that term).

To end the class, a short exercise of dwelling can be done. Similar to the prayer of the application of the senses described above, the students can be asked to focus on one bodily sensation or feeling from their contemplation or from an insight from any part of the session and just savor it. A colloquy with God can then serve as the culmination of the class.

While the point of the colloquy is encounter, it can have an added benefit: a 2009 study conducted by Gabriel Trionfi and Elaine Reese found that children with imaginary friends create richer narratives. The children, they observed, could also better relate their past and present experiences to the stories.[22] Imaginary conversation—imaginary not in the sense that our dialogue partners do not exist but in the sense that these involve the faculty of the imagination—can enhance our ability to contemplate.

Graduate Scripture classes depreciate too often into activities of mere "informational" rather than "formational" reading. Biblical

[21]Jessi Strong, "Philip Yancey: A Journey of Grace," *Bible Study Magazine* 7:2 (January–February 2015), 14.

[22]See Gabriel Trionfi & Elaine Reese, "A Good Story: Children with Imaginary Companions Create Richer Narratives," *Child Development* 80:4 (July–August 2009): 1301–1313.

scholar Robert Mulholland makes this distinction, and his description of these two ways of reading is summarized in the table below:[23]

Informational Reading	Formational Reading
covers as much material as possible as quickly as possible	focuses on smaller portions
linear, moving from the first element to the next	non-linear, concerned with depth; comfortable with multiple layers of meaning (even if they are paradoxical)
aims to master the text and gain control of interpretation	the text masters the reader who makes himself or herself vulnerable to the text; a disposition of receiving and responding
the text is an object; we must maintain our distance	the text is a subject; we relate with it
analytical, critical, judgmental	open, indwelling, loving
problem solving	diving into mystery

While there are aspects of "informational" reading which are helpful and important, Ignatian contemplation incorporated in graduate Scripture study balances these aspects with a more "formational" intention. Making space for dwelling in the text, though this certainly takes up time, ensures we do not just engage in "consumerist reading."[24] Knowing Scripture is not just about gaining new ideas and insights. To know Scripture is to have a deep appreciation of it. The goal should not

[23]Robert Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 1985), 30.

[24]See David I. Smith, "Reading Practices and Christian Pedagogy: Enacting Charity with Texts," in David I. Smith & James K. A. Smith, eds., *Teaching and Christian Practices: Reshaping Faith and Learning* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2011), 44. See also Paul Griffiths, *Religious Reading: The Place of Reading in the Practice of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

just be familiarity but intimacy with the Word of God—and ultimately, intimacy with God and the people through whom we meet God.

To integrate Ignatian contemplation in the classroom is to raise graduate Scripture study to a communal practice. Social theorist Pierre Bourdieu invokes the notion of *habitus* in making sense of the power of communal practices. *Habitus* is a system of

> durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them.[25]

Habitus is internalized as "second nature," functions as "accumulated capital," and is akin to a "practical sense," know-how, and an acquired and embodied rhythm.[26] In forming future pastors, inculcating this *habitus* is more important than dispensing facts and opinions which are easier to forget. This *habitus* may also be what these future pastors can best impart to the people they will serve in the future.

There is a trend in Scripture study that has sometimes led to an "over-historicization" of the Bible: finding the original text, the original context, and the original intention of the author. In this obsession with "originals," what is many times left out is a consideration of the original way of engaging Scripture. If we take the general lack of literacy and the great expense of producing texts into account, it is very easy to imagine communities gathered together around one manuscript being read out loud by one member. There are many clues in Scripture that tell us these texts were read in worship (open the Psalter and this becomes clear)—in prayer settings. Scripture was originally experienced in communal prayer. Perhaps it is time to retrieve this type of communal practice in the study of the Bible.

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[25]Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 53.

[26]Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 56, 66.

Integrating Ignatian contemplation in the classroom may be considered part of a student-centered pedagogy. From the point of view of Biblical scholarship, Ignatian contemplation may be considered part of reader-response criticism. But we cannot just end with this pole. Methods of studying Scripture are usually classified under approaches which focus on the writer or redactor, the text, and/or the reader. There is a fourth focus that must be considered: the Biblical reality which God invites us to enter. It is a reality that is communicated in the text, made vivid by historical-critical methods and communal practices, and addresses our own personal realities as well as the world's. It is a reality that is found in an encounter which takes place in the inventive and interpretative imagination.

On Imagination

Philosopher and theologian Garrett Green locates the imagination in the heart as it is understood in the Bible—the seat of intellectual and emotional functions.[27] To bolster this assertion, Green points to a verse that also addresses what we have been reflecting about: in Deuteronomy 30:14, the Word of God dwells in the human heart. Co-opting Paul Ricoeur's famous maxim "the symbol gives rise to thought," what thoughts arise when we replace "heart" with the word "imagination" in the verses below?

> Because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. (Rom. 10:9–10)

> I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness

[27]See Garrett Green, *Imagining God: Theology and the Religious Imagination* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1998), 108–113.

> of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. (Eph. 1:17–19)
>
> Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life. (Prov. 4:23)

The use of "heart" for imagination has another advantage. The heart is a bodily organ. This can remind us that to foster the imagination in reading Scripture, we must involve not only our thoughts and feelings but also, as we have seen above, our body and what it senses.

In conceiving of the imagination as "rule-governed invention" (or "norm-governed productivity") and "the power of redescribing reality," Ricoeur highlights the creativity of the imagination. Ignatian contemplation though is not a *creatio ex nihilo*, a creation out of nothing. We start with texts—the text of Scripture and the text of our lives. There are "rules" that guide our engagement with the text: the fruits of historical-critical study, the interpretations of others, the traditions we take on, and so on. We cannot just imagine anything that we want and expect it to be made real. Imagination "encounters limits to its own free play when confronted with the irreducible otherness of the other."[28] Imagination is still answerable and responsible to the other. To foster the imagination in reading Scripture, we must see it as an encounter and a response: a response to the text, to the deep realities inside us, to the undeniable realities of the world outside us, and to the God who invites us to redescribe these realities with God.

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[28]Richard Kearney, *Poetics of Modernity: Toward a Hermeneutic Imagination* (New Jersey: Humanity Books, 1995), 101.

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